

# MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

## Success Stories from the Field

### **DTC Communications Inc.**

#### **New Hampshire Manufacturing Extension Partnership**

#### **Cobham Surveillance Detects the Great Benefits of Implementing Lean**

##### **Client Profile:**

Cobham Surveillance, DTC Products, formerly known as DTC Communications, designs and manufactures miniature wireless audio and video communication products and electronic surveillance equipment for global law enforcement, military and other government agencies. The company produces microwave video transmitters, receivers and antennas for the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, Unmanned Ground Vehicle, and Robotics markets. Cobham Surveillance currently employs 137 people at its facility in Nashua, New Hampshire.

##### **Situation:**

Cobham Surveillance first contacted New Hampshire Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NH MEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, when they needed assistance in obtaining their ISO 9001:2000 certification. They worked with NH MEP's project manager Dave Hess who brought in an ISO specialist to assist the company. When Cobham Surveillance's parent company wanted all their subsidiaries to implement Lean, Cobham knew that Dave and NH MEP would be the right people to call.

##### **Solution:**

NH MEP provided the Le102 Lean Training for the Job Shop which introduces basic Lean terms and tools and shows how they can enhance processes both in manufacturing and above the shop floor to improve the way paperwork and product flows through the system. Everyone was able to see first-hand, how Lean tools could be applied to their specific job. Over the next few years, NH MEP hosted many Lean events and roundtables for Cobham's employees. The staff received instruction in 5S (Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain), Kaizen, Value Stream Mapping, Cell Design, Supply Chain and TIPS (Team Involvement Problem Solving). Cross functional teams learned how to apply these techniques and tools, on their own, throughout the plant.

In the Transmitter/Receiver area, company employees began by doing basic 5S to clean and organize, after which they implemented lot size reduction and point of use storage (POUS). By doing this they were able to double output from 25 units per week to 50. Seeing the success of activities like this one was instrumental in helping to spread a Lean culture to other areas of the facility. Employee teams have done Kaizens and cell designs throughout the plant. Another successful cell design produced a 20 percent improvement in output, and reduced workmanship defects by 80 percent. The product was a very labor intensive panel assembly with many delicate wires to attach. Too much movement and handling was resulting in defects. The area was cleaned and organized through 5S, and then POUS was implemented as well as some staging. They were able to get materials closer together and have tools readily available. This reduced handling and travel, eliminating 80 percent of the defects. Since Cobham has applied Lean, they have had management buy-in. This has been enhanced by making sure that all Kaizen teams include employees from a variety of departments to provide different perspectives. Cobham Surveillance has done a Kaizen on a Customer Service process which was

## MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

### Success Stories from the Field

being plagued by outstanding orders. By implementing visual status boards, they reduced lead time and efficiency improved. Kaizen events in Accounts Payable helped them reduce errors as well. Virtually all of the Cobham's product development is driven by customer demands, so they are always willing to examine new opportunities but their processes for doing this and for getting new products to market needed to be improved upon.

For their most recent project, Kaizen teams are working on the New Product Introduction process. This project involves new construction in the area that will house this work. Industrial engineers and engineers are being combined in one workspace so they can work as a team. They are making sure the appropriate tools are accessible and that they have the necessary IT services for all requirements. The goal is to improve time to market for new products which traditionally has been about 90 days. According to the team's calculations, these improvements should reduce that by more than half to approximately 30 days.

#### **Results:**

- \* Increased sales by \$500,000.
- \* Increased output by 120 percent.
- \* Reduced defects by 80 percent.

#### **Testimonial:**

"The results (of doing Lean) are fast and dramatic. Lean is an enterprise wide opportunity. We are lucky to have a good management team who buy in and promote Lean."

Dennis Goodman, Director of Quality